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SUBJECT: 9TH PARTY PLENUM ENDS WITHOUT A BANG

REF: A. 03 Hanoi 3156 B. 03 Hanoi 2175
- C. 03 HANOI 1805 D. 03 Hanoi 0175

1. (SBU) Summary. With no real surprises, the 9th CPV plenum concluded with predictable calls for faster economic growth and integration as well as tougher campaigns against corruption. No major personnel shifts were announced (or apparently made), but four Central Committee members were censured, including one involved in the 2001 Gia Lai demonstrations. The CPV continues to highlight the importance of stability for its economic and social well-being, which may account for the decision not to undertake - or at least articulate -- any bolder steps at this session. End summary.

2. (U) The Central Committee of the 9th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), elected in spring 2001, met in Hanoi January 5-12 for its 9th plenum, publicly touted as a review of CPV policies and implementation mid-way through the Party Congress. Apart from a final communique as well as opening and closing remarks by CPV General Secretary Nong Duc Manh, no other documents are yet available from the plenum, which apparently did pass a "resolution on a number of major policies and solutions." The resolution will likely be released later.

3. (SBU) Contrary to heated rumors in recent days and months that the plenum would make some top-level personnel shifts -- one version had Prime Minister Phan Van Khai stepping down from his Politburo seat in advance of his replacement as PM by a subsequent meeting of the National Assembly; another version would have dropped from the Politburo former Minister of Public Security Lt. General Le Minh Huong and CPV Economic Commission director Truong Tan Sang (already reprimanded formally for the Nam Cam mafia case), with new members allegedly to have included Deputy Prime Ministers Vu Khoan and Pham Gia Khiem and perhaps the head of PAVN's General Political Department -- no changes were announced or apparently even made. GS Manh's closing remarks highlighted the necessity of "stability" in the interests of development, and this overriding objective may have been a factor in deciding against rocking the leadership boat just yet.

4. (SBU) The Plenum patted itself on the back for making "important achievements" on 9th Party Congress goals, but urged even faster economic growth (i.e. over 8 pct in 2004 and 2005), doing more toward building "market-oriented economic institutions along the socialist lines," and "settling the most urgent social issues such as hunger eradication and poverty reduction." The Plenum also called for more international economic integration and early accession to WTO.

5. (U) Manh's closing remarks cited repeatedly the dangers of corruption, waste, and overly bureaucratic behavior by Party and State cadres and their families, and called for renewed attention to Ho Chi Minh Thought and "acting according to the model of Uncle Ho." He also urged closer supervision of officials by the Party, the Vietnam Fatherland Front, and mass organizations. He denounced "opportunism" and "individualism." The communique reiterated a call to "renew the Party leadership method," without explaining what this would entail.

6. (U) Unusually, the Plenum publicly reprimanded several officials, most notably Central Committee member and Ethnic Minorities Commission Chairman Ksor Phuoc, explicitly for failing to prevent the February 2001 demonstrations in Gia Lai province (where he was then Party Secretary) and for "losing security order." Central Committee member and Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Le Huy Ngo was also reprimanded for responsibility over a corruption case involving a MARD-related company (ref a), and the Plenum called upon the GVN to consider administrative punishment. Central Committee member and Ba Ria Vung Tau Provincial Chairman and Deputy Party Secretary Nguyen Tuan Minh was similarly reprimanded and recommended for State administrative punishment over a auto smuggling case, while Central Committee member and Quang Tri Party secretary Vu Trong Kim was reprimanded for having "lost internal leadership solidarity" in the province (possibly linked to

the punishment and early retirement of the provincial chairman in August/September 2003 -- ref b). These scoldings were broadly reported in the Vietnamese media.

17. (SBU) Comment: Compared to expectations of a more dramatic turn of events at this mid-term plenum, and even compared to the 7th and 8th plenums with their major resolutions on ethnic minorities, religion, land, and national defense strategy (refs c and d), the 9th plenum was a bit of a sleeper. More news may emerge over the weeks to come -- at least, after the Tet holidays -- but the CPV again appears to be committed to staying the course and avoiding any detours from its announced path of economic growth, integration into the international community, and renewed Party building and supervision.
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